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‘I’m not a real boy, I’m a puppet’: Computer-Animated Films and Anthropomorphic Subjectivity

Abstract

This article rethinks anthropomorphic representation and animated animality within the context of the contemporary digital era and, more precisely, against the rise of the computer-animated feature film. By interrogating the fractured identity of the anthropomorph as a necessarily hybrid figuration, it suggests how popular computer-animated films have rejected ánthrōpos and instead exploited the non-human morphē element to manipulate virtual space through anthropomorphic subjectivity. The anthropomorph is here refined into a more prescriptive and functional agent, absorbing the audience into a spectatorial game that sharpens their awareness of the digital realm. Films such as *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird, 2007) and *Bee Movie* (Simon J. Smith & Steve Hickner, 2007) are offered as case studies that reflect the shift towards the form or morphē element, one that is registered through a particular mode of subjectivied address. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's notion of 'gaseous perception' to elucidate this delivery of enlivened space, this article argues that the computer-animated film is implicated in a hierarchical switch away from humanlike behaviour to embrace the possibilities of the anthropomorph's non-human morphē identity, thereby upturning the received narrative of how anthropomorphism has been conceptualised among critical studies of animation.

Keywords

Animation, anthropomorphism, Pixar, animals, computer-animated film, Sergei Eisenstein, plasmaticness, subjectivity, focalization, Gilles Deleuze, gaseous perception.

Introduction

The prevailing orthodoxy concerning the construction and engagement with fictional animated characters is their organisation around behavioural patterns that are anchored to recognisably 'human' psychology, intentionality and proportion. At the root of this representational regime lies the creative and informative model of anthropomorphism, a term whose etymology can be traced back to 6th Century Greece, combining ἄνθρωπος (ánthrōpos) defined as human and μορφή (morphē) meaning shape or form. Invested primarily in the perception, presence and impression of consciousness, anthropomorphic representation holds particular currency within the histories and traditions of the animated cartoon. Patrick Power argues that persuasive 'anthropomorphic personification' is ultimately a defining register of animated aesthetics, so 'pervasive in cartoon and 3D feature animation that it is virtually synonymous stylistically with these genres' (2008: 37). Animation's evolution from hand-drawn to digital systems, from painted cel to single-point pixel, has done very little to moderate or destabilise the frequency of anthropomorphic representation across the medium's visual grammar. The earliest cycle of computer-animated shorts produced under the creative guidance of John Lasseter at the Pixar Animation Studios during the 1980s followed the Golden Age blueprint of Walt Disney and Warner Brothers by assuming a strong anthropomorphic approach. *Luxo Jr.* (John Lasseter, 1986), *Red's Dream* (John Lasseter, 1987), *Tin Toy* (John Lasseter, 1988) and *Knick Knack* (John Lasseter, 1989) centred upon the activity and agency of an anglepoise lamp, abandoned unicycle, child's musical toy and snow globe, objects whose sudden sentience

ran counter to the human involvement typically required to fulfil each item's function. Pixar's commercial projects and television advertisements made during this late-1980s/early-1990s period (for Listerine, Gummi Savers and Tropicana amongst others) similarly provided a space in which filmmakers such as Lasseter, Andrew Stanton, Pete Docter, Jan Pinkava, Jeff Pidgeon and Galyn Susman honed their craft by pushing at the boundaries of anthropomorphic characterisation, at the same time as they tested the visual possibilities of emergent computer graphics.

With the release of *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, 1995) and the arrival of the feature-length computer-animated film format, 'persuasive' anthropomorphosis had reached, in the words of Andrew Darley, an 'extraordinary' level (2000: 91). Indeed, the relatively short history of computer-animated filmmaking remains strongly interwoven with anthropomorphic characters and images. While biologically recognisable humans (and, in some instances, 'super' humans) do jostle for prominence as protagonists, 'humanised' animals and non-humans more regularly function as narrative agents populating these three-dimensional digital worlds, occupying and inhabiting virtual spaces through their residency and contributing to their plentiful "fullness' of people' (Heath, 1981: 179). Supporting both single stories and entire series - in the case of the *Ice Age* (2002-), *Madagascar* (2005-2012) and *Kung Fu Panda* (2008-) franchises - anthropomorphism remains the computer-animated film's default register, no less embedded within its screen narratives than it is implicated in those wider marketing and promotional enterprises that inform contemporary consumer-brand culture (Lanier et al, 2014: 35-54).[1]

Within the history and representational field of animated anthropomorphism, however, little distinction has been made between the pre-war era of Gertie the Dinosaur, Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse, the anarchy of Looney Tunes' talking ducks and 'wabbits,' and the spate of contemporary digital anthropomorphs that are assigned complex personalities in advance of (or in conflict with) culturally 'assumed' personae that stem from an animal's 'unwitting' semblance and mimicry of human conduct (Gould, 1987: 504). Mainstream computer-animated films have ultimately been subsumed into a broader creative anthropomorphosis, which represents a 'curious mix of 'fantasy' and 'reality' in which the spectator can recognise human traits in […] animal figures' (Wells, 2002: 161). By contrast, the newly digital constitution of anthropomorphism has fundamentally altered the way in which anthropomorphic representation and animated animality can function within an animated context. The guiding principle of this article, then, is to approach and elucidate anthropomorphism by forging a more fluid connection between the digital constructs of anthropomorph and diegetic world. To do so will involve some semantic reconfiguration, thinking more conceptually about the form or morphē component of the anthropomorph that is increasingly being raised into prominence at the expense of any prevailing humanness (ánthrōpos). By interrogating more directly the in-between and fractured identity of the anthropomorph as a hybrid figuration between poles of animacy and inanimacy, this article argues how computer-animated films have exploited the non-human morphē element of its characters - over any prevailing interest in their fluctuating degrees of human connotation - to control virtual space through anthropomorphic

subjectivity. With digital environments now glimpsed through the eyes of others, the virtual space has become increasingly articulated through a multiplicity of limited, broadened and unstable perspectives, with the increased manoeuvrability and peripatetic behaviour of the anthropomorph yielding new spatial orientations and possibilities for disparate fields of vision. Supported by developments in computer-animation and a virtual camera unencumbered with positional constraints, embodied anthropomorphic point-of-view in the computer-animated film is anchored to the nomadic sauntering of sentient non-human characters who are prized for their subjective abilities as ulterior forms or morphēs, rather than valued for their strict paralleling of human behaviour. Such a switch of emphasis both licenses the mastery of geographic exploration by computer-animated anthropomorphs across the virtual terrain, but also reconfigures the received narrative surrounding the function of these most enduring of character archetypes.

A special relationship: anthropomorphism's 'animated' history

Despite the widespread integration of animal and human intelligence across art, culture and religion, from Egyptian gods and deities, spiritual pre-Paleolithic shamanist culture, children's literature and folk tales (Beatrix Potter, George Orwell), mythology's divine beings and scientific examinations of animal behaviour, many writers have reflected upon why animated films have been consistently gripped by anthropomorphosis, their worlds often anthropomorphous in invention and design. Recent scholarship has not only tackled the topic of animated anthropomorphs in their multiplicity and variance, but also tied the

very history of animation as an early twentieth-century medium to 'the spectacle of anthropomorphism' and the visual pleasure of 'seeing something move *as though* it were human' (Riffel, 2012: 5). As agents of narrative and supported by discourses of visual and behavioural familiarity, animated anthropomorphs certainly permit the aesthetic exploration, dilution, exaggeration and satirising of the machinations of the human condition (psychology, intent, behaviour, socio-cultural hierarchies) through devices of allegory and analogy, symbolism and signification. Such meaningful anthropomorphic characters therefore function as 'pragmatic' solutions, part of an 'anthropocentric' explanatory concept insofar as they evidence how humans are able to 'make sense' of 'the deeply enigmatic and often hostile world in which they inhabit' (Lanier et al, 2014: 37) through the ascription of human connotation.

Allied to the ability of animated anthropomorphs (as visual phenomena or simulacra) to carry a host of implicit meanings, the attribution of humanlike qualities to non-human (often animal) characters as they intentionally act, and move seamlessly within, an animated space, has been theorised as a fundamental requirement of character design. Anthropomorphism is a representational strategy of accessibility, continually revived by animators to pique spectator recognition, interest, empathy and compassion in the animated figure being observed. Cognitivist Torben Grodal (1997: 89), for example, argues that:

> When watching a visual representation of phenomena without any centring anthropomorphic actants, we often 'lose interest' owing to lack of emotional motivation or the cognitive analysis of the perceived, a fact which many makers of experimental films have discovered when presenting their films to a mass audience.

Lasseter had certainly highlighted the value of anthropomorphism when giving his well-received and influential industry paper at the SIGGRAPH conference in July 1987, in which he discussed the necessity for appeal and personality across computer-animated characters. Speaking at length about the digitally-animated short films *The Adventures of André and Wally B* (Alvy Ray Smith, 1984) and *Luxo Jr.*, Lasseter observed how the desire for anatomical magnetism and perceptible 'charm' was rooted in the display of numerous human archetypes that compensated for the fact 'the live-action actor has charisma' (1987: 35-44). For the early pioneers of computer-animated technology, this allure (and the success of the character to be read as 'true' by the intended child audience) was communicated through an anthropomorphic schema: humanlike body dimensions matched with the hypothetical behaviour of objects under a range of disparate emotional states. Lasseter's particular 'concentration' on his characters' eyes was a key principle of the filmmaker's approach to anthropomorphism, one predicated on spectators' ability to coherently register the 'direction and purpose' of computer-animated figures through a

sensitivity to their ocular cues (including their 'stark black pupils' and 'erratic blinking') (Neupert, 2016: 40-41).

The ubiquity with which the cartoon form has been driven by an anthropomorphic impulse stems from the synonymy between animation and anthropomorphism as artistic models. Both are rhetorical strategies in service of characterisation: invested in degrees of personification, the impression (and impassion) of consciousness, and the presumption of subjectivity. Tim Tyler's description of anthropomorphism as 'The practice of attributing intentionality, purpose, or volition to some creature or abstraction that (allegedly) does not have these things' (2003: 269) could reasonably be offered as an explanation of animated technique and its predilection for movement, illusory action and the vigour of expressive agency. Yet animation simultaneously *obliges* any anthropomorphic imperative as an autonomous, *visualisation* and *elaboration* of conscious thinking. It is a medium that can dilute or attenuate a variety of representational positions within anthropomorphism as a social phenomenon, animating the kinds of civilising approaches to the non-human which, as Cliff Hamilton suggests, is something us humans have been undertaking for 'as long as there has been a developed form of communication' (1983: 166). Psychologists have examined at length this widespread phenomenon of *pareidolia* and the hard-wired, intuitive presumption of human consciousness that sees faces within places (separate from *apophenia*, or the visibility of meaningful patterns and connections in irregular data clusters). Within a clinical environment, the systematic misidentification of a particular stimulus according to degrees of personhood and human physiognomy has been a staple of the psychological

Rorschach inkblot test, and has contributed to examinations of children's brain skills of perception, recognition and comprehension.

Pixar's fourth computer-animated film *Monsters, Inc.* (Pete Docter, 2001) is highly explicit in drawing attention to the dramatic possibilities enabled by such 'false' information processing, and the role of animation in supplementing the unconscious projection of personality at the centre of anthropomorphic thinking. *Monsters, Inc.* opens at bed time on a restless, agitated young boy, who, during one of his nervous glances towards his cupboard door, briefly glimpses a slithering tentacle draped ominously over his bedroom chair (see Figures 1a and 1b). Shutting his eyes and summoning the courage to look again, the young boy is soon relieved to discover that the cause of his discomfort was merely the sleeve of a protruding jumper (see Figures 1c and 1d). Yet in *Monsters, Inc.*, the boy's unconscious attribution of humanlike form through *pareidolia* as a process of 'magical thinking' (Zusne & Jones, 2014: 77) is made concrete by the monstrous reality of the scenario. In an inverse disclosure, the initial impression of monstrosity and its 'realistic' demystification is itself a false reveal. The child (as anthropomorphiser) was correct in his original assumption, and the jumper is indeed a monster's extended appendage, albeit belonging to a creature who proves physically inept and, as a result, fails to pass what is nothing more than a scare simulation. Through its anthropomorphic agenda, then, *Monsters, Inc.* discloses how animation is capable of extending the terms of anthropomorphism as a psychological process by actualising the cognitive phenomenon of witnessing humanlike configurations. The 'intentional stance' (Kennedy, 1992: 93) fundamentally embroiled within

anthropomorphism - that supposes non-human desire, mental propulsion and predictive behaviour - is here made complicit in a deception. The anthropocentric perception of monsters by the child in *Monsters, Inc.* is offered, in turn, as a visual *possibility*, an *inaccuracy* and then a *certainty*.

[Figure 1 position]

The overriding discourse of 'humanisation' entwined with the anthropomorph is, as many animation scholars (Sandler, 1997; Wells, 2009) have made clear, part of the history of (how spectators have engaged with) animation, and thus expectedly finds a place within theories germane to an understanding of the medium. Anthropomorphism lies at the cornerstone of Sergei Eisenstein's writing on 'plasmaticness,' reflecting the allure that the Russian filmmaker and formalist felt towards Disney cartoons, and how scientific 'categories of zoology' were unsettled through their seductive (and empathetic) anthropomorphic fantasy (1988: 4). An Eisensteinian ecstasy towards the anthropomorph has continued to underscore the figure's sustained visual curiosity and increasing prevalence within the contemporary era of computer-animated cinema. Power argues that 'the idea of a rat in a restaurant would normally evoke disgust, but Remy the rodent/chef anthromorph in *Ratatouille* [Brad Bird, 2007] is more likely instead to engage and intrigue aesthetically' (2008: 26). Such admiration for the captivating anthropomorphic form within Pixar's culinary comedy supersedes the spectators' distaste towards the rodent's skilled preparation of gourmet cuisine. For Power, the magnetism of the anthropomorph is squared to its liminal, in-between identity, with the anthropomorph 'on the edge of chaos,

both at once' (Power, 2008: 23), insofar as it is caught within a transitional cycle of change between ánthrōpos (humanity) and morphē (form). The animated anthropomorph ultimately shimmers as an intrinsically ambiguous and fragmented agent, a mix of competing (and reciprocating) personalities and scenarios, and split by the rhetorical separating body the boundary or 'slash' that divides 'rodent/chef' in Power's description. The 'slash' is a semantic synecdoche confirming the anthropomorph's chaotic identity as a combination of multiple forms, a schizophrenic tension inhabited by the constituents of ánthrōpos and morphē that has prompted Wells to coin the '*Madagascar* problem.' Referring to the DreamWorks computer-animated film franchise that includes an assured African lion, hypochondriac giraffe, energetic zebra and sassy New York hippopotamus as its main cast, Wells describes the often tricky negotiation of animal (natural) and human (cultural) discourses within the politics of anthropomorphic identity. He points to a mutual dependency between human socialisation and the preservation of 'true animal actions, behaviour and primal motivation,' a relationship that supports the 'inner logic' (Wells, 2009: 22) of anthropomorphosis as animation's common representational strategy.

Despite the ongoing participation of computer-animated films with an anthropomorphic register, this article argues that their many humanised animal narratives have ultimately engaged the confrontation of animism and humanism with a greater degree of fluidity between those components either side of the 'slash.' Animators have looked to rigorously take advantage of the etymology of the anthropomorph by confronting its fractured and hybrid state. The presence of the paradigmatic 'slash' in Power's description

(separating Remy as 'rodent/chef') certainly raises important questions about which of the two identities in the anthropomorph should be ranked most 'animate.' However, this article does not reinforce the slash as fixed or immovable, nor does it eliminate it entirely, as each move would only muddy the waters even further. To begin to examine how computer-animated films typically meld together human and non-human registers, this article conceptualises the division between ánthrōpos and morphē as an altogether more porous channel through which ánthrōpos and morphē are permitted to interface and collide. The consequence of this representational shift towards form (morphē) at the expense of humanity (ánthrōpos) is that computer-animated film narratives have increasingly mined the non-human element of the splintered anthropomorph for its expressive, creative potential.

Ánthrōpos/morphē

The new legibility of the non-human, morphē characteristics in computer-animated film anthropomorphs is openly registered through a style of performance that frequently withdraws from ánthrōpos (attribution of human characteristics), and instead more readily inscribes elements of form as an opposition or complement to familiar humanlike qualities. In his discussion of puppet/puppeteer interaction, John Bell usefully speaks of 'the weird concept of letting the object determine the action,' a process that is underpinned by 'figuring out' how 'structure determines movement' (2008: 7). The assumption that human activity is the overwhelming blueprint for a non-human's presumed emotions is

destabilised in computer-animated films by the persistence of the morphē as an essential form of the anthropomorph that never alters. It is the anthroporph's morphē (rather than its human connotation) that is ultimately permitted to takes centre stage, interceding into the 'action' to both signal and dictate a mode of acting no longer committed to human-centred appeal. This gives licence for computer-animated films to navigate beyond traditional performance styles, and instead inaugurate a new form of 'method acting' that hinges upon – and exhibits the spectacle of - the magnetism of the morphē.

Drawing its design policy from Tex Avery's animated short *One Cab's Family* (1952) and *Susie the Little Blue Coupe* (Clyde Geronomi, 1952) made at the Disney studio - and with character names indebted to Isaac Asimov's short story *Sally* (1953) - both *Cars* (John Lasseter, 2006) and its sequel *Cars 2* (John Lasseter, 2011) immediately throw into relief the performance potential of the morphē. Within each film's creative process of automobile customisation, emotion in these sentient 'smart' cars is expressed through a familiar anthropomorphic design: eyes across the windshield, with mouths positioned over the front grille above the bumper. Yet each vehicle's anatomical coherency (key to the projection of 'emotion,' 'personality' and 'charm') and the application of human descriptors are often placed subservient to - or at least in dialogue with – a new level of engagement with the language of the object. These cars do not 'age', they rust, while a burst tyre constitutes nothing more than minor injury (though an oil spill is an embarrassing sign of incontinence). Cars of a particular vintage additionally cough and splutter, and their imperfect, 'aged' bodywork is often matched with old-fashioned, outdated views. This is

most obvious in the characters of Mater, a redneck tow truck, but also aging hippie Fillmore, who as a VW Type 2 camper van with psychedelic paintwork plainly gestures to 1960s American counterculture. Bell acknowledges that in the case of the automobile's perceived cultural value, 'cars have their own personalities, marked by make, color, size, style, and power' (2008: 172), something that *Cars* and *Cars 2* dramatize through multi-faceted characters that successfully support our emotional investment over the course of a feature-length (both the *Cars* films are the longest in the Pixar oeuvre). However, despite each films' capabilities for convincing humanlike automobiles acting and *re*acting for our spectatorial pleasure, the discursive power of the performances in *Cars* and *Cars 2* frequently hinges upon the exposure of communicative cues fundamental to their status as cars (typically, mechanical deficiency). The sporadic lapses into morphē momentarily alleviate the anthropomorph's degree of humanity, and reminds spectators of the authentic (if fallible) 'bodies' of cars by equating, in the case of *Cars 2* villain Miles Axelrod, a leaking engine with public humiliation.

The computer-animated film's attraction towards the authentic form of the non-human can, however, be further disclosed through narratives in which anthropomorphs are obliged to shed any acquired humanlike characteristics or identity (ánthrōpos), and instead fully encouraged to embrace their true morphē. In the DreamWorks computer-animated film *Shark Tale* (Vicky Jenson, Bibo Bergeron & Rob Letterman, 2004), compassionate great white shark Lenny is rejected by his criminal shark family for his unforgiveable vegetarian preferences. Just as Bruce the Shark in *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton, 2003)

attends underwater self-help classes to rehabilitate his natural carnivorous tendencies, Lenny's latent vegetarianism is perceived as a 'flaw' within his true sharkhood, one that has been widely understood among ideological criticism as a symbol of Lenny's 'odd' sexuality and performance of gay masculinity (King et al 2010: 45). In Walt Disney's *Bolt* (Chris Williams & Byron Howard, 2008), the eponymous canine must actually *learn* true animal actions following a pampered career spent in front of television cameras: a profession that has systematically rid him of typical dog skills. A protracted musical montage expresses the dog's attempt at burying bones and fetching sticks ('it's really a dog thing'), and the acquisition of 'dogness' is invoked by the film to develop the cross-species romance between Bolt and feline companion Mittens against the backdrop of the former's procurement of true animalism.

A network of relationships are clearly erected in computer-animated films between ánthrōpos and morphē as factors of identity held in delicate, even interchangeable, compromise. Yet by awarding space for the anthropomorph's primal instinct, base behaviour or the recuperation of an underlying morphē, these are films that actively interrogate what it means for a particular kind of animal or object to become subject to consciousness. Furthermore, if humanlike 'actants' drive the spectators' relationship of complicity with the anthropomorph (fostering audience reflection and introspection at the very image of humanity presented), then qualities and meanings drawn from the non-human morphē element permit ulterior connections with objects and animals of the world, and emphatic distinctions to be made regarding non-human ways of being. Sidestepping

dominant criticisms levelled at anthropomorphic thinking by scientific studies that 'guard against unwarranted attribution of human characteristics to other species' (Keeton 1967: 452), computer-animated film anthropomorphs are thus no longer burdened with the anthropocentric teleology of humanity, but are instead free to indulge gestures and rhythms that are rooted in their non-humanity. Indeed, the sporadic exclamations of 'squirrel' made mid-sentence by anthropomorphic canine Dug in *Up* (Pete Docter, 2009) not only verbalises the involuntary resurfacing of the character's suppressed morphē (otherwise disguised in his technologically-assisted proclivity for human speech), but literally speaks to the ongoing recovery by computer-animated films of a more non-human oriented vocabulary.

Given the emphasis placed by computer-animated films on the morphē as it able to suddenly cut across, interrupt, invert and guide the behaviour of anthropomorphs, a fruitful antidote to this new mode of digital anthropomorphism is the affiliated concept of therianthropy. One of many hybridised figurations of mythology that collate human and animal points of reference, the human/non-human ratio that structures therianthropy bears out precisely how computer-animated films have plotted new paths for traditions of animated anthropomorphism that are more readily anchored to a presiding non-humanity. Therianthropic images, according to Simon Baker, combine 'the form of a beast with that of Man,' but do so in a manner that relates to the metamorphosis *from* original human form *into* animality (2001: 108). Combining ánthrōpos with θηρίον (theríon) meaning beast or wild animal, therianthropes exist as human figures with animal features, traits or tendencies,

and are characters especially common to mythology and the fantasy genre. However, the manner in which Eisenstein describes the poetization of 'man in an image—in the form of an animal,' articulates a strong therianthropic rather than anthropomorphic mode of thinking in early animated storytelling (1988: 48). In this way, therianthropy (and affiliated concepts such as zoomorphism) emerges as a potentially useful animal/human rubric for identifying several representational norms of traditional, rather than digital, animation.[2]

Prior to the advent of digital technology, animated characters were typically therianthropic avatars for the animators who created them: cel-animated constructs that privileged human connotation over an engagement with their non-human morphē. Walt Disney's twenty-sixth animated feature *The Great Mouse Detective* (Ron Clements, Burny Mattinson, Dave Michener & John Musker, 1986) offers an obvious analogue to contemporary computer-animated anthropomorphism. The 'mouse detective' character in the Disney film's title prefigures the rodent/chef dualism of *Ratatouille*'s Remy, and thus corroborates (rather than invalidates) the splintered identity that underpins the animated anthropomorph as a crossbreed figure. Closely following a therianthropic representational style, the grafting of human schemata, mannerisms and intellect upon Basil the eponymous mouse/detective forfeits several nuances of rodent behaviour. He communicates little about mousehood and the tribulations of being a rodent living in nineteenth-century London. Functioning as essentially a human clothed in beast (in this case rodent) form, Basil has more in common with the biological reality and lifestyles of Humankind. He smokes a pipe, plays the violin and his mouse-hole residence on Baker Street (*our* Baker

Street of human proportion) is decorated with antiques and a roaring log fire. There is minimal engagement with his rodent identity (his morphē) and the film, like many of its cel-animated predecessors opts instead to paint its worlds as strikingly therianthropic.

Animation scholars may query this assumption that pre-digital animation (and particularly Disney) failed to fully confront the anthropomorph's morphē component. What about the celebratory musical number 'Everybody Wants to be a Cat' from *The Aristocats* (Wolfgang Reitherman, 1970)? Or Lumière's 'Be Our Guest' song-and-dance routine in *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale & Kirk Wise, 1991) in which he claims to 'do tricks' with his 'fellow candlesticks,' or the hyperactive Genie in *Aladdin* (Ron Clements & John Musker, 1992), who constantly restates his mythological status as a supernatural force, explaining through song that Aladdin has 'never had a friend like him.' However, 'Everybody Wants to be a Cat' is rendered a paradox by the cats that perform it. The felines have little trouble playing instruments, singing and dancing in a way that recognisably approximates to human form (just as King Louie's desire in *The Jungle Book* [Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967] to 'be like' Mowgli, or Louis the alligator's wish to be a 'human being' in *The Princess and the Frog* [Ron Clements & John Musker, 2009] seems equally redundant given their proclivity at song, dance, and in the case of Louis playing the trumpet). Secondly, Lumière and his companions Cogsworth and Mrs. Potts in *Beauty and the Beast* are *literal* therianthropes, cursed to live as a candelabra, clock and teapot respectively. Yet all are switched back into their original *human* bodies to resume their prior roles as maître d', majordomo and housekeeper. *Beauty and the Beast* thus anticipates

Disney's later therianthropic characters Emperor Kuzco (*The Emperor's New Groove* [Mark Dindal, 2000]) and Tiana and Naveen (*The Princess and the Frog*), whose switch from their magically-induced morphē of mammal (llama) and amphibian (frog) are similarly reversed once the characters have redeemed prior moral indiscretions. Finally, the supernatural Genie, whilst not strictly a therianthrope, is nonetheless morphed into a loose human appearance during the film's emotive 'happily ever after' climax. His *Pinocchio*-like quest to be 'set free' is satisfied through his visual transformation into human shape, thereby reversing villainous Jafar's own transition from human-to-genie (suitably, the sorcerer then returns to humanity in the sequel).[3] These metamorphoses back to human form contrast with Princess Fiona in DreamWorks' irreverent computer-animated film *Shrek* (Andrew Adamson & Vicky Jenson, 2001) who, in an emphatic rejection of ánthrōpos, openly shuns her human identity to remain what Lord Farquaad dismisses as a 'disgusting' ogre. The sequel *Shrek 2* (Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury & Conrad Vernon 2004) does include sequences in which Shrek and Fiona each lapse into human semblance, but now it is their ánthrōpos selves that are framed as abnormal, and so both are restored to their 'authentic' ogre (morphē) identities in a shared pact of true love. A similar fate befalls therianthrope Dr Cockroach in the studio's more recent *Monsters vs. Aliens* (Conrad Vernon & Rob Letterman, 2009), whose extradiegetic transformation into an insect from his original human is one that the film chooses never to rectify.

The computer-animated film's progressive investment in the morphē of its characters reaches a climax in *Ratatouille*, Pixar's aforementioned culinary comedy telling the

story of rat-turned-chef Remy. Brad Bird's film takes its place alongside Disney's *The Great Mouse Detective* in a popular 2-D animated rodent tradition, which began with Mickey Mouse's *Plane Crazy* (Walt Disney & Ub Iwerks, 1928), but which also contains *The Rescuers* (Wolfgang Reitherman, John Lounsbery & Art Stevens, 1977), *The Devil and Daniel Mouse* (Clive A. Smith, 1978), *The Secret of NIMH* (Don Bluth, 1982), *Heidi's Song* (Robert Taylor, 1982), *An American Tail* (Don Bluth, 1986), *The Rescuers Down Under* (Hendel Butoy & Mike Gabriel, 1990), *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West* (Phil Nibbelink & Simon Wells, 1991) and television series *Tom and Jerry* (Hanna-Barbera, 1940-), *Danger Mouse* (Brian Cosgrove & Mark Hall, 1981-1982; 2015), *Tube Mice* (Sara Bor & Simon Bor, 1988) and *Biker Mice From Mars* (Rick Ungar, 1993). What distinguishes *Ratatouille* from this rat pack is a consistent admission of protagonist Remy's own rathood at the expense of anthropomorphic impersonations of human beings. The film begins with his voiceover narration, which laments the basic 'problem' that he is a rat. 'This is me,' he concedes, in a gesture that self-consciously verbalises the inherent tensions and schizophrenia of a human/non-human character. Remy's admission also directly reverses the crisis of identity experienced by villainous Ratigan in *The Great Mouse Detective* who claims that he is, in fact, 'not a rat' but a 'big mouse.' Though Ratigan's riposte is designed to address 'humanity' as the act of being humane and benevolent, his words also reflect how the film preserves a fundamental humanity (ánthrōpos) to its characters over that of their 'rathood' or morphē. Indeed, as an animated revision of Professor James Moriarty in this Sherlock Holmes retelling, the

strongly humanised Ratigan is dressed in a bespoke tailored grey suit, top hat, white gloves and an embossed gold cane, despite his sporadic lapses into a more feral physicality.

Within the context of other computer-animated films, however, Remy's narration in *Ratatouille* also serves another purpose. Evoking Woody's angry retort to Buzz Lightyear in *Toy Story* that he is 'just an action figure,' Weaver's 'you da ant' praise to fellow insect Z in *Antz* (Eric Darnell & Tim Johnson, 1998), Samson's motivational dictum in *The Wild* (Steve Williams, 2006) that 'you're a lion, *be* a lion' and Socrates the lion's admission to chimpanzee Toto in *Animals United* (Reinhard Klooss & Holger Tappe, 2010) that 'playing Monkey must be fun,' *Ratatouille*'s narration instantly establishes the self-reflexive treatment of one of animation's defining characteristics, that of using animals-as-characters. Later in the film, Remy accompanies his father Django to an exterminator shop, whose window is adorned with a macabre display of dead rats, poisons and rat-traps. Reviewer Andrew Osmond notes that this sequence reminds Remy how 'rats and humans are natural foes' (2007: 66), yet it simultaneously brings into relief their incompatibility as species *through* a visceral confrontation with the rats' own mortality and existence as vermin. The graphic shop-window display therefore resolves a conundrum posed earlier in the film, in which Remy is heard briefly squeaking in his native rat tongue, rather than the American accent of stand-up comedian Patton Oswalt who otherwise provides his speaking voice. The abrupt switch from human vernacular to high-pitched squeaks makes audible the inherent tensions of identity embedded within the anthropomorph. This moment also suggests that any shift away from ánthrōpos to morphē is neither finite, nor is it irreversible, but a fluid 'dialogue'

between the two possibilities.[4] Anticipating Dug's highly comic 'squirrel!' proclamation in *Up*, the 'slash' dividing Remy's character is therefore carefully constructed to allow the digital character frequent, but perceptible, slips into non-human identity. *Ratatouille* therefore encourages the audience to rethink the potential (im)balance of human representation and animality across animated anthropomorphism, offering a glimpse into how computer-animated films might begin to restructure its human/beast binary.

Focalization and fictions

By erecting a more permeable and fluid boundary between ánthrōpos and morphē, the anthropomorph of the computer-animated film has itself 'morphed' into more than simply a figuration of human resemblance. Rather than hold an anthropomorphic mirror up to human form and mimic its distinguishing characteristics or traits, these films have begun to unravel the tensions and connections between ánthrōpos and morphē, the animate and inanimate, subjects and objects. In the computer-animated feature-film, there is a greater investment in the volatility between the two poles, a deeper interest in objects *as objects* rather than objects *as humans*: rats-as-*rats*, rather than rats-as-*chefs*. This reversal in agency from human ánthrōpos to non-human morphē is, however, most commonly articulated in computer-animated films through dynamic point-of-view subjectivity, a degree of perspectival intrigue, and a continuous innovation of spectator viewpoint. The computer-animated film's engagement with the morphē has, this article suggests, produced multifarious axes of action. The varying of angles and the reorganisation of the spatial

coordinates within these fictional worlds is the product of an anthropomorphic eye (the eye of the anthropomorph) that is in constant positional flux. Transmitting the story in this manner creates a style of anthropomorphic narration couched in more vivid and visually dynamic terms, with a new saliency and forcefulness that has its roots in an anthropomorph who has rejected its human essence in favour of exploring the dynamic potentials of its morphē.

In tune with this new animated treatment of anthropomorphosis, the anthropomorph itself has shifted into new territory and begun to assume alternate textual properties. Characters such as Remy have evolved into more prescriptive and functional agents: part of the computer-animated film's textual system, which controls, expands, modifies, limits, and alters spectators' access to that which unfolds in its fictional worlds. Through an engagement with their subjectivity, the spectator is optically guided by the anthropomorph through various diegetic *matter*, transforming it into *meaning*. The visual methods by which the spectator discovers and explores the fiction's spatial constituents and dimensions are not detachable from the anthropomorphic perspectives from which they have been shown. As the hub of such diegetic information, the anthropomorph thus becomes, in Gérard Genette's terms, a narrative 'focalizer' of the constructed fiction (1988: 72). Focalization describes the angle of vision 'from which the life or the action is looked at' (qtd. in Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, 2005: 82). It is a term that can become a verb ('focalizing' or 'to focalize') or adjective ('focalizor'), in a way that point-of-view and perspective cannot (Bal, 1985: 143), and so it provides an expedient way of examining the

computer-animated anthropomorph's dynamic interaction with its digital world ('the focalized'). These films regularly (re)construct their fictional worlds by using the spatial proximity of the anthropomorph (as a dominant focalizor), and the array of unexpected angles of vision that can emanate from it. One additional point to consider when examining how plot action or events are filtered through anthropomorphic perception is Seymour Chatman's work on 'diegetic consciousness.' This term pertains to the intellectual, emotional and perceptual parameters of a character in relation to its place in the fiction (Chatman, 1990: 146). All that we *need to know* of the computer-animated world is, in fact, often all that we *can possibly know* from the anthropomorph's mediating perspective and primary consciousness (a primacy or immediacy to diegetic events). Personalising the space in this manner creates the world as aesthetically and stylistically anecdotal, a virtual reality that is visually channelled through the anthropomorph's individual activities, movements and viewpoints within, through and across it. Anthropomorphism in the computer-animated era can, therefore, be recast on the side of diegesis, and involved in a wider discourse of fictional world creation, transmission and representation. Computer-animated worlds are not solely 'lived' through an anthropomorphic humanity or recognisable 'actants,' but through an engagement with the anthropomorph's 'diegetic consciousness' that is heavily inflected by its *other* identity as a non-human.

Let us return to *Ratatouille* alongside another computer-animated film, *Bee Movie* (Simon J. Smith & Steve Hickner, 2007). Both have their worlds continuously narrated through disorientating, dynamic perspectives and an innovation of viewpoint that owes a

debt to the computer-animated film's increased engagement with morphē. Ten minutes into *Ratatouille*, Remy and his brother Emile are confronted with a shotgun-wielding Grandma trying to rid her house of a rodent infestation. The action traverses both horizontal and vertical planes, and it is the manoeuvrability of Remy and Emile as they scatter that takes the sequence through a variety of spatial levels: from floors, to tables, kitchen tops, along gas pipes and structural beams, to an explosive climax upon a swinging chandelier (which, in a comic epilogue, crashes to the floor to return the sequence back to a human level) (see Figures 2a and 2b). A similar exploration of space occurs in DreamWorks' *Bee Movie*. The film tells the story of oppressed worker bee Barry B. Benson, whose non-conformist attitude leads him to reject the labour of the Honex Industry workforce, and instead assume a more active role away from the production line. During his first flight outside the safety of the hive with the Pollen Jock Flying Corps, insect Barry becomes attached to the fur of a tennis ball. This unfortunate act prompts a kinetic sequence in which the spectator follows the ball's unstable trajectory as it is served and traverses the net back and forth between the players (see Figure 2c). The ball then inadvertently leaves the court, propelling Barry into a maze of New York traffic, from which he is then sucked into the labyrinthine engine of an oncoming motorcar, the camera following his negotiation of the vehicle's pumps and pistons (see Figure 2d).

[Figure 2 position]

The viewing positions tendered during these sequences are unconcerned with satisfying a live-action promise, instead foregrounding the numerous capabilities and

potentials of anthropomorphic representation. The space is consistently reconstructed and reframed through a sustained volley of conceptual and innovative viewpoints, the source of which being Remy, Emile and Barry, whose anthropomorphic eye is privileged over that of the other human characters who partake in the scenes. The visual experience of each sequence thus emerges from the immediacy through which each event is diegetically narrated, and the function of the anthropomorph as a focalizor of the action in soliciting such narrational modes. But within each film's broader allegiance towards the anthropomorph's subjectivity, it is ultimately the morphē identity, or 'morphē eye,' which is rendered most dominant, and central to how the scene (and its narrative drama) is transmitted. The camera did not need to occupy such intrusive, exploratory and dynamic positions; the animators could certainly have located it elsewhere, telling the story from more conventional, 'grounded' places within the fictional world. But it is the energy of the non-human morphē eye and its aptitude for spatial discovery that is used to inscribe the spectator into the world, and skew their perception of the events that unfold there. Remy and Barry's 'take' on the scene - their own specific focalized angle of vision as rat and bee protagonists - is animated to be the spectator's own viewing position. The sequences *as they are shown*, and the viewpoints disclosed, engage with the anthropomorph at the new level of morphē. The spectator is not confused by the text's subjective strategies, nor do the films yield to a disorder that edges the spectator closer towards absolute incoherence and abstraction. Rather, *Bee Movie* and *Ratatouille* absorb and invite the audience (through the

figure of the anthropomorph) to participate in a spectatorial game that sharpens their awareness of the virtual realm and its spatial dimensions.

The action that takes place in computer-animated films is mediated and mobilised by the mobility of the anthropomorph, and by the film-maker's increased investment in the diverse potentials of the morphē. Yet such is the aptitude of the virtual camera (a revolutionary technical development operational beyond wholly animated cinema) that it is licensed to *ignore* the anthropomorph and manoeuvre *anywhere* it chooses. This is something Mike Jones is keen to stress when describing the spatial composition and vanishing points of the virtual camera in *Monsters, Inc.*, one that moves 'in a way that defies time and space, ethereally beyond it' (Jones, 2007: 236). Conceiving the unrestricted virtual camera as a 'phenomenon of intangible and abstracted presence,' Jones actually turns to the humanizing effect of anthropomorphosis, suggesting there is an 'anthropomorphic embodiment' to the digitized space that creates the illusion that it has its own point-of-view: an 'eye' because it is an 'I' (2007: 237). However, this attribution of an omnipotent perspective downplays the concrete textuality, tangibility and presence of the anthropomorph as a particular *resident* or inhabitant of the fiction. In fact, it is the virtuosity of a virtual camera no longer restricted by human positioning, or by its status as physical apparatus, which can permit the relocation of subjectivity *into* the anthropomorph's 'eye' in the first instance, a figure that through anthropomorphism itself already exists in the text as an animate 'I.'

Deleuze and gaseous perception

This new tactile treatment of an anthropomorphic eye/I in computer-animated films subsequently 'anthropomorphises' the spectator as an embodied navigator of the virtual space. Such a process permits what Giuliana Bruno calls embodied tours of the 'cine-city,' a term especially resonant with the vigorous *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie* sequences, in which the spectator shifts from a 'static contemplator' into a mobilised anthropomorphic state undertaking journeys in virtual space (Bruno, 2002: 56). With perception freed from the physics of human perspective and allied to the non-human (Remy, Barry), computer-animated films can be illuminated by the systems of subjective variation and fragmentation formulated around what Gilles Deleuze has called 'gaseous perception.' This is an abstract, free-floating mode of expression that Laura U. Marks describes as akin to drug-induced delirium (2000: 161). Breaking with the normal conditions of human subjective experience allows the audience to achieve an open flow of 'hallucinogenic' perception that can be said to be experienced by objects, which are situated in their position of uncontaminated objectivity. As Deleuze puts it, this is 'the pure vision of a non-human eye, of an eye which would be in things' (Deleuze, 1986: 81). Not only do these observations accord with computer-animated films' repeated reliance on non-human protagonists to tell its stories - from garden gnomes (*Gnomeo and Juliet* [Kelly Asbury, 2011]) to penguins (*Penguins of Madagascar* [Eric Darnell & Simon J. Smith]) - but the purity of a subjectivity 'in things' describes a spectatorial disengagement from human compositional logic. Gaseous perception therefore fits within the broader shift occurring in the anthropomorphic

representations of computer-animated films *away* from ánthrōpos (human subjectivity), and *towards* the possibilities of the morphē (the object or 'thing'). Although unrelated to his brief comments on animation made in *Cinema 1* and instead theorised in relation to mid-twentieth century American experimental cinema (Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, Jordan Belson, Ken Jacobs), Deleuze's 'gaseous' conceptualisation of decentred point-of-view perception free from anchor points nonetheless seems to fit with the heterogeneous virtual spaces tended by - and through - the anthropomorph. There is certainly something compelling and 'hallucinogenic' about a computer-animated 'cine-eye' (itself an anthropomorphic means to describe cinema) that behaves like the randomized movement of a molecule or, for that matter, a rat or bee. Even the etymological roots of hallucination in Latin - meaning *to wander mentally* - are reflected in the capabilities of Remy and Barry for sporadic and erratic behaviour as they negotiate the geography of their own 'cine-city.'

By not separating its viewpoints from the purposeful focalised subjectivity of non-human agents, computer-animated films naturally tender a different kind of 'free-floating' subjectivity not as fully amorphous as the 'gaseous' mode of perception engendered for Deleuze in 1960s experimental film (which resisted the creation of a centralised subject). This is despite the increased flexibility of digitally-assisted film production and computer-animation that enables a more intuitive virtual camera, one whose own continuous 'free-flowing movement' described by Jones (2007: 237) more readily aligns with the altered, hallucinogenic state and audiovisual sensorium central to Deleuze's notion of a 'gaseous' cinema. However, even with perspective conducted through the anthropomorph as an

agent of irregular perception, computer-animated films are no less 'at the service of variation and interaction' (Deleuze, 1986: 80). The rhythmic pacing and action of the enlivened non-human (that is, crucially, exploited for its virtues as such) foreground the flux of randomness in movement; those spaces and dimensions that are visible but become momentarily occluded; and the reflexive play on digital technology's capabilities for transgressive spatial orientation. Both *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie* can ultimately be considered 'gaseous' insofar as they involve multiple sequences whose spectacle derives from a boundlessly shifting composition and the connections *between* multiple diegetic points. William Brown argues that 'for Deleuze, cinema becomes gaseous when it escapes human perception and abandons its otherwise all-pervasive anthropocentricism' (2012: 268). The non-anthropocentric (perhaps, newly morphē-centric) cinema accessible in computer-animated films (re)makes the virtual space and its perspectives not as solid, but as a highly gaseous set of spectatorial experiences. The mise-en-scène of *Ratatouille* and *Bee Movie* frequently emphasises the momentum of subjectivity as both de-centring force and chaotic impact, rooted in the very intensity (and uncertainty) of proximity yielded by the anthropomorph's agitated, airy non-human body.

The dislocation from physical constraints and spatial experimentation, following the disorientation stimulated by hallucinogens, is therefore not a delusion or mirage, for it has its roots in the concrete textuality and diegetic presence of the anthropomorph. *This* is the method, the 'drug,' which can induce in spectators such animated hallucinations and the gaseous state. Deleuze's claim that the gaseous 'cine-eye' (Dziga Vertov's non-human

eye) is 'not the eye of a fly or of an eagle, the eye of another animal,' obtains additional significance in computer-animated films because their 'cine-eye' is often precisely that (1986: 83-84). Their many 'animalised' embodiments even coexist with abstracted perspectives made available by the subjectivity of objects not conventionally anthropomorphised as humanlike subjects in scientific or social cognition (due to their lack of obvious physiognomic markers), such as a baseball and bat (*Everyone's Hero* [Colin Brady, Daniel St. Pierre and Christopher Reeve, 2006]) or garden vegetables (*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2* [Cody Cameron & Kris Pearn, 2013]). Shifting away from the stable point-of-view of human subjects to the decentred and 'gaseous' anthropomorph takes us into another, perhaps more obvious, area of Deleuzian philosophy. Through an embodied 'cine-eye' - whether a fly (*A Bug's Life* [John Lasseter, 1998], eagle (*Valiant* [Gary Chapman, 2005]) or a penguin (*Happy Feet* [George Miller, 2006]) - computer-animated films enact Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal' which, despite being not strictly an anthropomorphic impression of humanity, remains concerned with the partition between human and animal (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 265). Here, 'becoming' is attained through an 'unnatural participation' predicated on penetration and spectatorial embodiment. Creative and fictional 'becoming' is intrinsically related to animated anthropomorphism as an artistic process. It recalls both Winsor McCay (how *would* a mosquito operate) as well as Lasseter, who declared at SIGGRAPH (1987: 43) that anthropomorphic characters are embodied according to a fictionalised and hypothetical thought process.

The point-of-view (POV) shot becomes an intriguing tactic of 'becoming' in this respect, especially as it involves the unnatural merging of human with anthropomorphic eyes. A subset of the eyeline match, the POV shot features in a wide range of computer-animated films as a technical flourish and emphatic display of subjective alignment (if not allegiance). Towards the beginning of *Toy Story*, for example, the embodied agency of Woody signifies the broader narrative shift away from human (Andy) to non-human (toy) perspective. As Woody glides down the bannister towards the arms of his owner (see Figures 3a and 3b), the disorienting angle of vision cues an adjustment in the film's address to the spectator, one that is allied to the degree of consciousness and newly-suggested animate life behind the cowboy doll's painted eyes. In *Toy Story 3* (Lee Unkrich, 2010), the point-of-view shot becomes a similar device of drama. During a sequence at Sunnyside Daycare, the behaviour of the riotous, rampant children towards the plastic playthings is registered through Buzz Lightyear's point-of-view, as the space ranger confronts (with his comically fixed, moulded grin) the looming mouth of a toddler that presses down upon Buzz's plastic visor (see Figures 3c and 3d). Structured around what Edward Branigan calls the 'point/glance' shot and the 'point/object' shot (1984: 1), the repetition of point-of-view in computer-animated films spotlights its status as a key component of their visual language, as well as confirming its role in labelling anthropomorphic characters as emphatic focalizors. But it is also a stylistic device deployed by computer-animated films to involve their audience in a rhetoric of Deleuzian 'becoming,' whether this is 'becomings-rat

[*Ratatouille*], becomings-insect [*Antz*], [or] becomings-wolf [*Hoodwinked!* (Cory Edwards, Todd Edwards & Tony Leech, 2005)]' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 265).

[Figure 3 position]

It would be something of a misnomer to discount how computer-animated films, as examples of mainstream narrative cinema, are not structured by an overarching 'classical' model of narration, one that traditionally privileges an illusionist, transparent textual system rooted in diegetic coherency and legibility. Many computer-animated films adhere to the logic of classical storytelling (establishing shot, continuity editing, 180-degree rule, shot/reverse-shot) at the same time as they fully confront the dizzying possibilities of anthropomorphic subjectivity, thereby revealing a push-pull relationship in their formal style between the visual bravura of animated intervention and a more restrained 1940s/1950s Hollywood classicism. *Toy Story*, as Neupert argues, adheres 'comfortably within many conventions of classical Hollywood storytelling,' just as *A Bug's Life* 'follows fairly classical shot composition with a very functional pacing and some intensified continuity editing' (2016: 92, 134). Charles Tesson in *Cahiers du Cinéma* similarly argues that with *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter, 1999) 'the classical style of the mise-en-scène guarantees the character's humanity' (qtd. in Neupert, 2016: 151). While computer-animated films make use of classical 'human-centred' perspectives (and human characters) in their configuration of diegetic space, this is nuanced by a more erratic, variegated articulation of the digital environment attributable to the activity of the anthropomorph. With human characters and their perspective featuring as merely a component of the image, the attraction of computer-

animated film anthropomorphism, then, involves the spectators' ability to momentarily reject their own ánthrōpos, cross species, and take an embodied (rat's-eye or bee's eye) tour of the virtual world in the skin of another kind. The heightened flexibility of the anthropomorph as a non-human morphē permits it to surmount the limitations of a human (ánthrōpos) eye that is an otherwise fallible and immobile receptive organ. Through the animator's exploitation of non-human morphē over that of the figure's human connotation or ánthrōpos, the anthropomorph of computer-animated films ultimately becomes the pinnacle of putting 'perception into things,' into 'matter,' the pure vision of a non-human eye (Deleuze, 1986: 83). During each of these 'becomings,' the spectator (as perceiver) relinquishes power over the fiction to the anthropomorph, and must accept its subjectivity and its morphē as the mediating interface.

Conclusion: A plasmatic fiction?

Networked across a variety of computer-animated films, the anthropomorph has given the filmmaker license to experiment with the spatial horizons of the digital world through conceptual perspectives and orientations, without impediment. The anthropomorph's sporadic behaviour and dynamism of movement (anchored to the morphē of its existence) continuously makes available a range of proximities and observation points, deployed to involve the spectator in a rhetoric of *seeing things differently* through the inhabiting and embodiment of place and space. Computer-animated anthropomorphs provide a fluid interchange of observation points and axes of action, constantly reframing or 'deforming'

the action to allow the spectator to perceive the events taking place in the fictional worlds through a highly inventive cinematic eye. Within this intensification of anthropomorphic subjectivity and its raising to a higher pitch of emphasis, the anthropomorph itself enlivens all corners of the virtual world in which it resides. Just as the library of mobile doors in *Monsters, Inc.* descend, dip, spiral and rove through the fictional space during the film's climax, the anthropomorph similarly crafts for the spectator innovative and inventive entry points into the virtual geography. The fictional world is transformed into an open (and open*ed*), multi-dimensional state of omni-directionality in which no one angle is privileged, but whose spatial coordinates are made variant through the continual exchange of the horizontal and vertical axes of action. The arrangement of pixellated space and binary code in the computer-animated film frame becomes activated in its entirety by the kinaesthesia and virtual virtuosity of the anthropomorph, whose gaseous, molecular contact with the virtual cartography is able to 'animate' each pixel of this digital domain into agency.

Such connections between character and fictional world returns computer-animated films to one of the defining virtues of anthropomorphic representation within animation, that of Eisenstein's notion of 'plasmaticness.' There are certainly distant echoes of Eisenstein's voice in Tobey Crockett's use of 'protean' to describe his own fluid conception of a digital diegesis, particularly the discourses of power and powerlessness that he argues underscores 'the emergence of a new subjectivity which comes with the territory' (2009: 118-119). Yet computer-animated films return to, and revaluate, 'plasmaticness' through the interactions between the anthropomorph and the fictional world that contains it. The

'slash' that splinters human and non-human identities can be reconceptualised as a new plasmatic channel, through which ánthrōpos and morphē frequently intersect and collide to form new power relations and anthropomorphic constructs. While animators may be heirs to anthropomorphic representations from hand-drawn techniques *past*, they have implemented digital technologies of the *present* to instil in the boundary a new protoplasmic instability that allows a more flexible engagement with the morphē. The 'plasmatic' energy of the 'slash' is subsequently transferred to the surrounding virtual world through the anthropomorph's subjectivity, which reorients spectator viewpoint in a process that renders the dynamic digital space highly changeable. The 'plasmatic' experience of a film's fictional world retains the same powers of seduction for the spectator as the animated line did for Eisenstein in the 1930s; its spontaneity, its freedoms and its omnipotence. The fictional milieus of the computer-animated film have ultimately begun to adopt many of the values associated with the anthropomorph, through their mutation into intensely *subjectivied* locales: a toy's story, a bug's life, a shark's tale, or a bee's movie. But the often discontinuous, disorienting exploration of 'plasmatic' place and space within a world, and the ability of the spectator to 'dynamically assume any form' (Eisenstein, 1988; 21) or, for that matter, any morphē, fail to compromise the validity of the fictional world as a world. The focalizing of computer-animated film fictions by the mediating force of the anthropomorph, and its capabilities for reorganising their world's spatial coordinates, is part of a deliberately frenetic, aesthetic experience in which the spectator is constantly *shown* the geography of the virtual environment, rather than simply left to *see* it.

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[1] In the teaser trailer for Walt Disney's recent computer-animated feature *Zootropolis* (Byron Howard, Rich Moore & Jared Bush, 2016), the word 'anthropomorphism' actually materialises onscreen to give shape and definition to the film's modern civilized world and its humanised animal citizens. Dismissed by the voiceover narration as simply 'a big fancy word' that describes how animals 'walk around on two feet, they do not go to work nude […] and they use technology,' *Zootropolis* self-reflexively folds animation's representational history back onto itself.

[2] Combining the Greek ζωον (zōon) with μορφη (morphē), zoomorphism occupies a similar representational terrain to that of therianthropy. Zoomorphic images across art, religion and mythology involve animal characteristics being grafted onto non-animals (humans, gods), thereby visualising human behaviour as equivalent to (or comparable with) animal actions. In both instances of human/animal intersection, the humanity of the construct is preserved, either as the normalised default *into* non-human other and back again through shape-shifting (therianthropy), or as the foundation *onto* which animal attributes are superimposed (zoomorphism). Disney's 'classic' cel-animation, I would argue, operates more according to this therianthropic/zoomorphic predominance of humanity. As Donald Duck put it in the Disney cartoon *Early to Bed* (Jack King, 1941), 'Maybe I'm just a duck, but I'm human!', thus disclosing the degree to which the studio's animated characters maintained human conduct at their centre.

[3] In *The Return of Jafar* (Tad Stones & Alan Zaslove, 1994) - and while still being a genie - the royal vizier maintains his human façade in order to be 'a little less overwhelming.' Furthermore, despite their prevailing discourse of therianthropy, Disney's anomalous decision to jettison its practice of transforming non-humans back into humans for *Brother Bear* (Aaron Blaise & Robert Walker, 2003) produced, as Wells notes, a 'genuinely surprising ending' given that protagonist Kenai wished to stay in his enforced bear form and not return to his true humanity (2009: 47).

[4] Alex the lion (*Madagascar* [Eric Darnell & Tom McGrath, 2005]), grizzly bear Boog (*Open Season* [Jill Culton, Roger Allers & Anthony Stacchi, 2006), chimpanzee Comet (*Space Chimps* [Kirk DeMicco, 2008]), Nat the preteen fly (*Fly Me to the Moon* [Ben Stassen, 2008]), Bolt the dog (*Bolt*) and Reggie the turkey (*Free Birds* [Jimmy Hayward, 2013]) are some of the other computer-animated film characters who have been heard in their true morphē or animal parlance, rather than the linguistic proficiency of their (often 'star') voice actors.

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